Contact: Scott Coppenbarger
scottcoppenbarger@icloud.com
(954) 205-0178

NEWS RELEASE
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FROM STRUGGLING READER TO TOP OF HER CLASS: OKLAHOMA STUDENT'S STORY HIGHLIGHTS POWER OF EARLY INTERVENTION

As Oklahoma implements the Strong Readers Act in the 2027-28 school year, Ashdyn Frazier's progress shows how evidence-based reading instruction can change a child's academic future.

VALLIANT, Okla. — When Valliant Public Schools Superintendent Brandon Frazier realized his youngest daughter, Ashdyn, was struggling to read in first grade, he knew something wasn't right.

She was a bright student who appeared to be reading, but a closer look revealed a different story. Rather than decoding words, she was relying on pictures and context to guess what the words said. When she took tests on the books she had read, her answers often revealed that she wasn't recognizing the words themselves.

"She was smart enough that she was looking at the pictures and reading what she thought made sense," Frazier said.

Concerned about her progress, the family traveled to Texas to have Ashdyn evaluated for dyslexia. Finding appropriate testing resources had been difficult, and the family ultimately paid for private tutoring to help their daughter develop the reading skills she needed.

That decision led them to Mary Maxwell, a reading specialist and certified academic language therapist at Valliant Public Schools. Maxwell began working with Ashdyn using

Take Flight, a structured literacy program designed for students with dyslexia and grounded in the science of reading.

The lessons focused on building the foundational skills that proficient readers need, including connecting sounds to letters, recognizing syllable patterns, spelling words and understanding how words are formed. Instruction was explicit and systematic, giving Ashdyn repeated opportunities to practice skills until they became more automatic.

Initially, Maxwell worked with Ashdyn after school twice a week. She later joined a small group of students receiving targeted reading instruction, where they could practice, ask questions and make mistakes in a supportive environment.

The progress came quickly.

“Within four months of being under her working in her program, my kid became a more confident reader,” Frazier said.

Two years later, Ashdyn is at the top of her class, he said.

For Maxwell, the transformation involved more than improved reading scores. She remembers Ashdyn as a quiet student who sometimes became anxious about making mistakes. As her reading skills developed, so did her confidence which is a work in progress.

“There were a lot of ‘aha’ moments,” Maxwell said. “She started to shine in what she was doing.”

Through immersive reading, Ashdyn began developing a greater interest in books and became more confident in the classroom. Instead of focusing primarily on scores and goals, she began volunteering to lead activities, speaking more confidently in class and sharing her thoughts about the books she was reading. With immersive reading it helped expand Ashdyn’s vocabulary knowledge because she was able to read at a higher grade level.

Maxwell said Ashdyn’s progress has exceeded even her expectations. While Ashdyn may still need additional time and a quiet place to complete tests, she can demonstrate what she knows when given the right support.

Ashdyn’s experience has reinforced for her father the importance of identifying reading difficulties early and providing effective instruction before students fall further behind.

“I think the key is early intervention,” Frazier said.

He said families in rural communities may have limited access to evaluations and specialized services, leaving some children without the help they need. Schools, he said, can play a critical role in identifying reading challenges and connecting students with appropriate support.

As an educator and parent, Frazier supports Oklahoma's move toward evidence-based reading instruction through the Strong Readers Act, which the state is preparing to implement for the 2027-28 school year.

The law is designed to strengthen early literacy through reading screening, targeted intervention, teacher training and additional support for students who struggle to read. It also emphasizes keeping parents informed about their children's progress and providing assistance before reading difficulties become more difficult to address.

Ashdyn's story illustrates why those efforts matter. A child who appeared to be reading was actually relying on clues to make sense of text. With an evaluation, structured instruction and consistent support, she developed the skills to read independently—and the confidence to participate more fully in the classroom.

For Frazier, the outcome is a reminder that struggling readers can succeed when adults recognize their needs and connect them with the right instruction.

"Eighty percent of my parents do not have the means to go have that done," he said of obtaining evaluations. "They just can't do it. And so if I cannot provide that here at school, those kids are just missing out just because they don't have the funds or the resources to go get that done."

As Oklahoma prepares for statewide implementation of the Strong Readers Act, Ashdyn's progress offers a personal example of what early identification, evidence-based teaching and timely intervention can make possible.

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